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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: A LIVING BUDDHA SPEAKS: LIFE DIFFICULT AFTER LHASA RIOTS

REF: A. BEIJING 3966  
[1](#)B. BEIJING 4092  
[1](#)C. CHENGDU 247

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson.  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) Life remains very difficult for Tibetans even as the March unrest fades into memory, according to a living Buddha at Lucang Monastery in Guinan, Qinghai Province (strictly protect). Although PRC authorities accused 128 Lucang monks of taking part in the March unrest, this living Buddha recently told PolOff that none of his colleagues have been detained, even though approximately ten monks from other Guinan-area monasteries were apprehended during the August Olympic Games. Local Guinan city officials take a largely hands-off approach to managing the monastery, but the provincial-level Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) is more intrusive, summoning high-ranking Buddhist figures to the provincial capital in October for a political study session on "socialism," for example. Travel remains difficult for monks, with this living Buddha preferring to wear regular clothes when visiting Beijing to avoid police scrutiny. After the March 14 Lhasa rioting, the Qinghai RAB gave additional funding to several monasteries, but Lucang's government-controlled "Democratic Management Committee" used the money to build a new office, with none of the funds going to support religious activity. PolOff's living Buddha contact is resisting authorities' efforts to develop tourism at Lucang because, he said, such commercialization has seriously degraded spiritual life at other Qinghai monasteries. End Summary.

BACKGROUND: POLOFF'S LIVING BUDDHA FRIEND

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[1](#)2. (C) Luosang Cicheng Pengcuo (strictly protect), the 6th reincarnation of the "Jiamao Dalama," is one of three living Buddhas resident at the Lucang (Tibetan "Lutsang") Monastery in Guinan (Mangra), a majority Tibetan town in eastern Qinghai Province. PolOff spoke with Pengcuo at his monastery in Qinghai on September 22 and again in Beijing on November 9 about conditions following the outbreak of unrest in Tibetan areas in March.

[1](#)3. (C) Born in Guinan in 1975, Pengcuo only started elementary school at age nine because schools in Guinan were slow to reopen after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Of the nine children in Pengcuo's family, only Pengcuo and one other sibling received any formal education. After graduating from elementary school at the age of 15, Pengcuo entered

Lucang Monastery, where he was recognized as a reincarnate in 1992.

#### LUCANG DESTROYED IN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

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14. (C) Lucang Monastery is home to 350 monks, only 145 of whom are formally registered with the Guinan County Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). Pengcuo's teenage nephew is one of many unregistered novices at Lucang. Though growing, Lucang Monastery's population is still below what it was in 1958, when 450 monks resided there. According to Pengcuo, Chinese troops entered Lucang during the Tibetan uprising of March 1959 and shot several monks. Indiscriminate violence against monks continued during the Cultural Revolution, and Lucang was razed to the ground. Pengcuo told PolOff only 13 of the 450 monks resident in 1958 survived the Cultural Revolution. One of the survivors was Lucang's abbot, himself a living Buddha, who began restoration of the monastery in 1980.

#### MARCH UNREST: MONKS FORCED TO SIGN CONFESSION

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15. (C) Pengcuo denied that Lucang monks had been involved in any organized protests following the outbreak of unrest in Tibetan areas of China in March. Any problems, he said, were the result of "overreaction" by local authorities. In the week following March 14, People's Armed Police (PAP) troops encamped in the mountains behind Lucang "waiting for

BEIJING 00004646 002 OF 004

something to happen." Security authorities later demanded that 128 Lucang monks sign a statement admitting to participation in demonstrations. Pengcuo said that the 128 figure was arbitrary and that he had no idea how security officials came up with that number. Younger monks, believing authorities would be more lenient on them, offered to sign the statement in place of the older monks. Pengcuo said the Lucang monks eventually decided that they would all sign the statement, presenting security officials with the choice of "arresting everybody or nobody." In the end, according to Pengcuo, no Lucang monks were arrested.

#### OLYMPICS-RELATED DETENTIONS

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16. (C) Pengcuo reported that authorities engaged in a second round of detentions in the run-up to the Olympic Games. About ten monks from Guinan-area monasteries, but none from Lucang, were detained during the Olympic Games in August. In addition, "several" monks from Guinan who were studying in Lhasa were detained during the Games, with some being sent to a prison in Golmud, Qinghai Province.

#### REFUSAL TO ATTEND OLYMPICS FOR PROPAGANDA PHOTO OP

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17. (C) During a visit to Beijing in the weeks prior to the Olympics, Pengcuo said he was visited twice by Public Security Bureau (PSB) agents. Upon learning of his status as a living Buddha, the PSB officers grew increasingly concerned about his presence in the capital. The State Council Information Office eventually proposed to Pengcuo that he attend some of the Olympic events so that he could be photographed by state media. Tired of the police interviews and not wanting to be used in official propaganda, Pengcuo decided to leave Beijing before the opening ceremony.

#### TRAVEL DIFFICULT IN MONKS' ROBES

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¶8. (C) Since March 14 it has been "difficult" (bu fang bian) for monks and nuns to travel, especially to Lhasa. Pengcuo said he prefers to wear plain clothes during his frequent travels to Beijing and Shenzhen so as not to attract unwanted police attention.

(Comment: It is not uncommon for senior Tibetan monks to travel to China's large coastal cities to teach Han Buddhists.) Pengcuo said he was "fortunate" to have a passport, which he obtained in 2006 to attend a Buddhist gathering that year in Thailand. The Public Security Bureau in Qinghai's Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, where Guinan is located, originally denied his passport application because, Pengcuo said, they were afraid he would use it to visit the Dalai Lama. The PSB relented after "I told them that I really would go to India if they refused to give me a passport," Pengcuo said. Though he has toyed with the idea of traveling to Dharamsala, Pengcuo said, he has held off making such a trip so as not to create "difficulties" for himself or his monastery.

LOCAL RAB GIVES MONKS SPACE...

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¶9. (C) Since July, with the withdrawal of PAP forces from Guinan, local RAB officials have returned to their traditional "hands-off" approach to managing Lucang. So long as the monks do not protest, Pengcuo said, the local RAB "turns a blind eye" to the many Dalai Lama pictures on display. Though monks are technically required to attend regular political education sessions, the local RAB merely drops off the material at the monastery with an instruction that the monks review it "on their own." Pengcuo noted that, while the Party Secretary of Guinan County is Han, the majority of other officials are ethnic Tibetan. Many of these cadres are also practicing Buddhists who frequently go to Lucang at night to pray and make offerings, Pengcuo said.

...BUT PROVINCIAL RAB MORE HARD-LINE

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¶10. (C) Guinan's leaders are under pressure from higher levels to be "tougher," Pengcuo observed, stating that the Tibetan head of the Guinan PSB was demoted following the March unrest for being too

BEIJING 00004646 003 OF 004

"easy" on Tibetans. Provincial-level RAB and security officials, Pengcuo said, are much more "intrusive" than their local counterparts. For example, Lucang monks must remove Dalai Lama images prior to inspections by provincial RAB leaders. Local Tibetan RAB cadres, however, always tip off the monks to these visits well ahead of time. In addition, since March the Qinghai RAB has stepped up efforts to indoctrinate high-ranking monks. Pengcuo was among a group of seven prominent Buddhist figures summoned by the Qinghai RAB in October for a meeting to receive political education in "socialism." This is the first time such a meeting has been called, he said, and is "directly related" to March 14. Pengcuo managed to get out of the October study session by saying he had "previously scheduled business" in Beijing.

HAN IGNORANCE OF BUDDHISM KEY PROBLEM

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¶11. (C) "It is the Communist Party, not the Chinese people" who are responsible for the repression of Tibetan Buddhism, Pengcuo emphasized to PolOff. "Independence from China is not the key issue," Pengcuo asserted, adding that Tibetans really want

only to be left alone to practice their religion. Many of the frictions between monks and security officials in Tibetan regions stem from Han cadres' ignorance of Buddhist practices. As an example, Pengcuo recalled an incident at Lucang in October 2007 when the monastery's abbot died. Han security officials in Guinan mistook the flurry of activity related to the abbot's passing as a celebration of the awarding of the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal to the Dalai Lama. The Guinan officials dispatched several police cars to Lucang, and this disruption of the abbot's funeral rites "infuriated" many of Lucang's monks, Pengcuo said, "especially the younger novices."

#### NOMAD RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM HIGHLY RESENTED

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¶12. (C) Aside from official interference in Tibetan Buddhism, Pengcuo cited the nomad resettlement program as another major source of resentment around Guinan. (Note: During a September trip to Tibetan areas of eastern Qinghai Province, PolOff saw several recently constructed resettlement communities.) Although the Government covers 60 percent of the cost of the new homes, Pengcuo said, the plan is creating tensions because nomadic families are being forced to reduce the size of their sheep and yak herds. Despite authorities' explanation that this step is necessary to protect the Tibetan plateau from overgrazing, Pengcuo said, the policy is causing a steep reduction in herders' incomes.

#### REINCARNATION: CONSULTING THE DALAI LAMA FIRST

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¶13. (C) At some point in the next three to four years, Lucang's monks will embark on a search for the reincarnation of their abbot who died last year, Pengcuo said. The first stage of the process will involve discussions with the Dalai Lama's office in India to receive guidance. Next, Pengcuo explained, he and other Lucang leaders will need to "get in touch with" (da zhao hu) the Guinan and Qinghai RABs prior to starting the search. This ensures that the reincarnated abbot will be recognized both by the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government. Pengcuo said his own reincarnation followed a similar pattern.

#### "WE DON'T WANT TO BE A TOURIST TRAP"

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¶14. (C) While the Government provided Lucang with financial support for reconstruction in the 1990s, Pengcuo said, the monastery is now self-sufficient, with donations from believers funding all religious activity. Following March 14, he added, Qinghai provincial authorities provided funds to many monasteries in an effort to "pacify" monks. Lucang received some funding, but the monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) "used all the money to build itself a new office," Pengcuo complained. (Note: DMCs frequently function as extensions of local RABs and are often charged with enforcing government policies inside monasteries.) Qinghai officials have contemplated developing Lucang for tourism, but Pengcuo said he opposes this idea because

BEIJING 00004646 004 OF 004

of the polluting effect it would have on the monastery. Pengcuo was highly critical of the commercialization of Ta'er (Kumbum) Monastery outside Qinghai's capital city Xining. The money generated by entrance ticket sales at Ta'er does not support religious practices, Pengcuo asserted, and one of Tibetan Buddhism's holiest sites is now crawling with incompetent tour guides "spouting nonsense."

## FOREIGN DONATIONS PROBLEMATIC

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¶15. (C) Prior to his death in 2007, Lucang's abbot charged Pengcuo with rebuilding one of the monastery's main buildings destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. Pengcuo is currently attempting to raise RMB eight million (USD 1.2 million) for the project, primarily from Han Chinese Buddhists, and travels frequently to China's major coastal cities to fundraise. Although Pengcuo interacts with Buddhists from Taiwan, he anticipates that raising funds anywhere other than Mainland China and Hong Kong would likely create problems with PRC authorities. Lucang's DMC, Pengcuo said, has told him that any donation from outside Mainland China would require approval of the Qinghai provincial RAB.

¶16. (C) Beyond fundraising, Lucang faces additional restrictions in its dealings with foreign Buddhists. Pengcuo said that while a small number of Lucang's 350 monks are Han Chinese, the monastery cannot accept students from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Macao. A Russian national once asked to join the monastery, but the Guinan RAB forced him to leave after one week.

## RADIO FREE ASIA POPULAR

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¶17. (C) Pengcuo told PolOff that he and other monks listen frequently to Radio Free Asia's Tibetan service, especially programming in their native Amdo dialect. In addition, they receive some Tibetan satellite television broadcasts from India. Pengcuo said monks at Lucang have some awareness of the recent talks between the Dalai Lama's representatives and the Communist Party's United Front Work Department. Nevertheless, he said, they have only a vague understanding of the large Tibetan exile conference that took place in Dharamsala in November.

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